

1ST PHASE UZ POLLS Four AL picks to be elected unopposed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Four upazila chairman candidates from the ruling Awami League are set to be elected uncontested as they have no rivals.

Two vice chairman aspirants and an equal number of female vice chairman contenders in four other upazilas also have no competitors in the coming polls, Election Commission officials said yesterday, which was the last day for filing the nomination papers.

A total of 87 upazilas will go to polls on March 10 in the first phase of upazila elections.

Milton Chandra Roy, assistant returning officer in Joypurhat, said only AL candidate SM Solaiman Ali submitted nomination papers for Joypurhat Sadar.

Jamalpur district election officer Mokhlesur Rahman said for Melandaha, Sarishabari and Madarganj upazilas, nomination papers were filed only by AL candidates Kamruzzaman, Gias Uddin Pathan and Obaidur Rahman respectively.

EC officials said these four would be elected unopposed if the papers

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Visiting Indian Air Chief Marshal Birender Singh Dhanoa calls on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at her Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban office yesterday.

PHOTO: PRIME MINISTER'S PARLIAMENT OFFICE

Sajeda to be deputy leader of House

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League presidium member Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury is set to become deputy leader of the House for the third consecutive term.

Leader of the House and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina sent a letter to Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury to take measures in this regard.

President's Press Secretary Joyal Abedin, who is now in Singapore with President Abdul Hamid, told The Daily Star that a gazette notification on Sajeda's appointment would be issued soon.

Earlier on Thursday, Hasina in a letter to the Speaker requested her to make Sajeda, lawmaker from Faridpur-2, the deputy leader of parliament.

In February 2009, Sajeda succeeded late Zillur Rahman as deputy leader of the House.

The post fell vacant as Zillur stepped down after being elected president.

A Language Movement veteran and one of the organisers of the country's Liberation War, Sajeda was also the deputy leader in last two parliaments.

She served as minister for environment and forest and was awarded the Swadhinata Padak, according to a press release of the Parliament Secretariat.



Insects

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"urgently needed" to "allow the recovery of declining insect populations and safeguard the vital ecosystem services they provide," wrote co-authors from Sydney and Queensland universities.

The biologists conducted a systematic review of 73 historic reports of insect declines across the world.

Ten percent of known insect species have already become extinct, compared to one percent of vertebrates, they found. Of the insects that remain, 41 percent are in decline.

Over the past 30 years, the total mass of all insects dropped an average of 2.5 percent annually. The "dramatic" fall suggest none will be left in 100 years, warned Francisco Sanchez-Bayo, of the University of Sydney's School of Life and Environmental Sciences.

"The rate of decline is really huge," he told BBC Radio 4's Today.

Butterflies and moths are among the worst affected, along with bees and dung beetles. Researchers said "a considerable proportion" of aquatic fly species had also been lost already.

The review highlighted four key drivers of extinction: habitat loss caused by agriculture, urbanisation and deforestation; pollution; biological factors such as invasive species and diseases; and climate change.

Agriculture was the "main culprit" in 40 percent of the studies reviewed, with researchers highlighting "the way we apply pesticides" as a particular threat.

"We have been doing agriculture for thousands of years and we have never seen these declines," said Dr Sanchez-Bayo. "The introduction of systemic insecticides has been in a big change in the way we do agriculture these days."

The review, published in the journal Biological Conservation, said: "Unless we change our ways of producing food, insects as a whole will go down the path of extinction in a few decades."

"The repercussions this will have for the planet's ecosystems are catastrophic to say the least."

Researchers added dwindling insect populations were further evidence of a sixth mass extinction underway among animal and plant species worldwide.

HC orders ACC to launch probe

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Such adulteration will damage human health, it added.

The court asked whether there was any point in having money and property when the peoples' health was damaged.

The dishonest should be brought to book, it said.

The HC then issued a rule asking the respondents, including the chairmen of Food Safety Authority, members of Kendriyo Khadya Nirapatta Byabasthapna Samannay Parishad (Central Food Safety Management Coordination Committee) and chairman of Bangladesh Standard Testing Institute (BSTI) to explain in four weeks why their inaction and failure in preventing

adulteration and taking appropriate legal steps against it should not be declared illegal.

The court asked them to show causes why the production, carrying and preserving of the adulterated milk, curd and cattle feed found in shops, departmental stores and open market should not be declared illegal.

The rule asked the respondents to explain why they should not be directed to remove such milk, curd and cattle feed from the aforesaid places and to bring those responsible to book and to prosecute them.

The HC bench of Justice Md Nazrul Islam Talukder and Justice KM Hafizul Alam came up with the order and rule following reports on adulteration published in The Daily

Star, the Prothom Alo and the Kaler Kantha yesterday.

According to The Daily Star report, a government study has found in raw cow milk excessive levels of lead, regular consumption of which is harmful to the human health.

Conducted by the National Food Safety Laboratory (NFSL) of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, the study also detected high levels of chromium in cow feed.

Besides, it found excessive presence of pesticide, antibiotics and bacteria in raw cow milk.

"Heavy metals found in milk came from cattle feed, while pesticide is present because of its excessive application on grass and other agricultural

feed," Prof Shahnila Ferdousi, head of the NFSL, told The Daily Star.

"This is happening mostly due to the lack of awareness among farmers and feed manufacturers," she said.

Yesterday, the HC bench asked Prof Shahnila to submit the report before the court in 15 days.

Secretaries to the ministries of cabinet division, food, agriculture, livestock, health and home affairs have also been made respondents to the rule.

Supreme Court lawyers Syed Mamun Mahub and Hassan MS Azim placed the newspaper reports before HC for necessary orders while Deputy Attorney General AKM Amin Uddin Manik represented the government.

Demand ignored

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The final list will be published on the website on February 20, Prof Mahfuzur said.

The distribution of nomination papers for 25 posts will begin on February 19 and continue until February 25. The last date of nomination paper submission is February 26.

Anyone can withdraw candidacy till 1:00pm on March 2 while the final list of candidates will be published on March 3. The supplementary voter list will be published on March 5.

Since the formal dissolution of Dhaka University Central Students' Union (Ducusu) in 1998, several attempts have been made to arrange the election but all in vain.

The last polls to Ducusu and hall unions took place in 1990.

Worries over wastewater

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By consuming and using polluted water for bathing, washing and for household work, marginal people, especially the children, are becoming prone to various diseases.

And things could get even worse.

The study predicts that by 2021, the textile sector would export goods worth \$50 billion a year.

Samad said the predicted yearly effluent discharge figure for 2021 and onwards was conservative since it was assumed that 65 percent woven and 15 percent knit fabric would still be imported.

"The wastewater generation has been increasing in Bangladesh and it will go up higher than the projected rate considering the steady growth of local textile industry," he said.

The government categorises textile dyeing industries as "Red industries" (most polluting) under the Bangladesh Environment Conservation Act, 1995 and the Environment Conservation Rules, 1997 and made Effluent Treatment Plants (ETPs) mandatory for the factories.

Shahidullah Mia, an expert who installs the plants at factories, said there were over 5,000 ETPs installed in factories and those cover about 70 percent of the textile units. Small facto-

ries do not have ETPs, he said.

Sources in the Department of Environment (DoE), however, claimed that they have issued ETP installation permission to 1,376 textile factories.

According to sources in the Bangladesh Textile Mills Association, the country has around 450 spinning mills, 1,200 weaving mills and around 5,000 export-oriented dyeing factories.

There are several thousand small dyeing factories catering the local markets as well.

Factories have to run a chemical and a biological ETP, Shahidullah said, claiming that some 10 percent chemical ETPs are run as they are expensive to operate while all the factories use the biological ETPs as they are cheap. The chemical ETPs need to be operational all the time.

"Factory owners need to spend between Tk 17 and Tk 20 for treating a litre of wastewater with the chemical ETPs."

The study, intended for policymakers, textile engineers, and environmentalist so that they could develop innovative technologies and policies for textile dyeing and effluent treatment, said a more scientific approach could reduce water usage by 23 percent.

It suggested strict monitoring of effluent treatment to curb pollution.

Iqbal Habib, member secretary of urbanisation and governance programme of Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (Bapa), said the situation regarding environment pollution is getting worse every day.

"Individual accountability has to be ensured so that none can dump wastewater into the river without treating it."

He suggested setting up of central ETPs for clusters of factories.

Textile factory owners claimed that they have started to use modern technologies to reduce the use of water to make their plants less expensive to run.

"We have reduced water usage in washing fabrics by more than half," said Mostafiz Uddin, managing director of Chittagong-based Denim Expert Ltd.

He mentioned a laser machine they were using to shine denims. They used to sand blast the fabric to shine them but that required a lot of water to wash them later on.

Shama Proshad Ghosh, senior general manager of Envoy Textile, a reputed denim factory in Bhaluka, said, "The parameter of our ETP is set at high standard as the discharged water is used in the fish pond on the factory

premises.

"We collect samples from the ETP to test in our own lab for maintaining the quality of discharged water."

"Running the ETP is expensive. We spend Tk 24 for treating one cubic metre of water," he said.

Monsoor Ahmed, secretary of Bangladesh Textile Mills Association (BTMA), said, "Almost all large factories run effluent treatment plants as it is mandatory." They cost Tk 20 crore to Tk 35 crore to install.

Stringent conditions set by the DoE and delays in handing out clearance discourage textile factory owners from setting up ETPs, he said.

Quazi Sarwar Intiaz Hashmi, additional director general of the DoE, said, "The allegation of delaying the clearance for ETP is not true. We try our best to give the clearance within the quickest possible time but whenever we find any technical problems, delays are naturally caused."

Hashmi said, "One does not build a house without a toilet. Then why would you build a factory without an ETP? We have found factories that discharge wastewater without treating them."

- Publication of final voter list Feb 20
- Nomination paper distribution Feb 19-25
- Last date of nomination submission Feb 26
- Publication of final list of candidates Mar 3
- Voting from 8:00am to 2:00pm

On January 17 last year, the High Court ordered the DU authorities to take steps to hold the elections in six months. The university last month announced the elections will be held on March 11.

Student leaders welcomed the decision to finally hold the polls but demanded the authorities ensure coexistence of all organisations and set up polling stations at the academic buildings.

After yesterday's announcement, the activists of Progressive Students' Alliance, a platform of left student bodies, brought out a procession on the campus protesting "the one-sided Ducusu schedule."

"The ruling party's student wing has been favoured in the schedule as the authorities did not take initiatives to set up polling centres at the academic buildings, ignoring the demand of most of the student bodies," Chhatra Union President Liton Nandi said at a rally after the procession.

Talking to The Daily Star later, Liton said they want to participate in the polls but they doubt if there will be a fair election in this situation.

BNP-backed Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal demanded a fresh schedule keeping polling centres at the academic buildings.

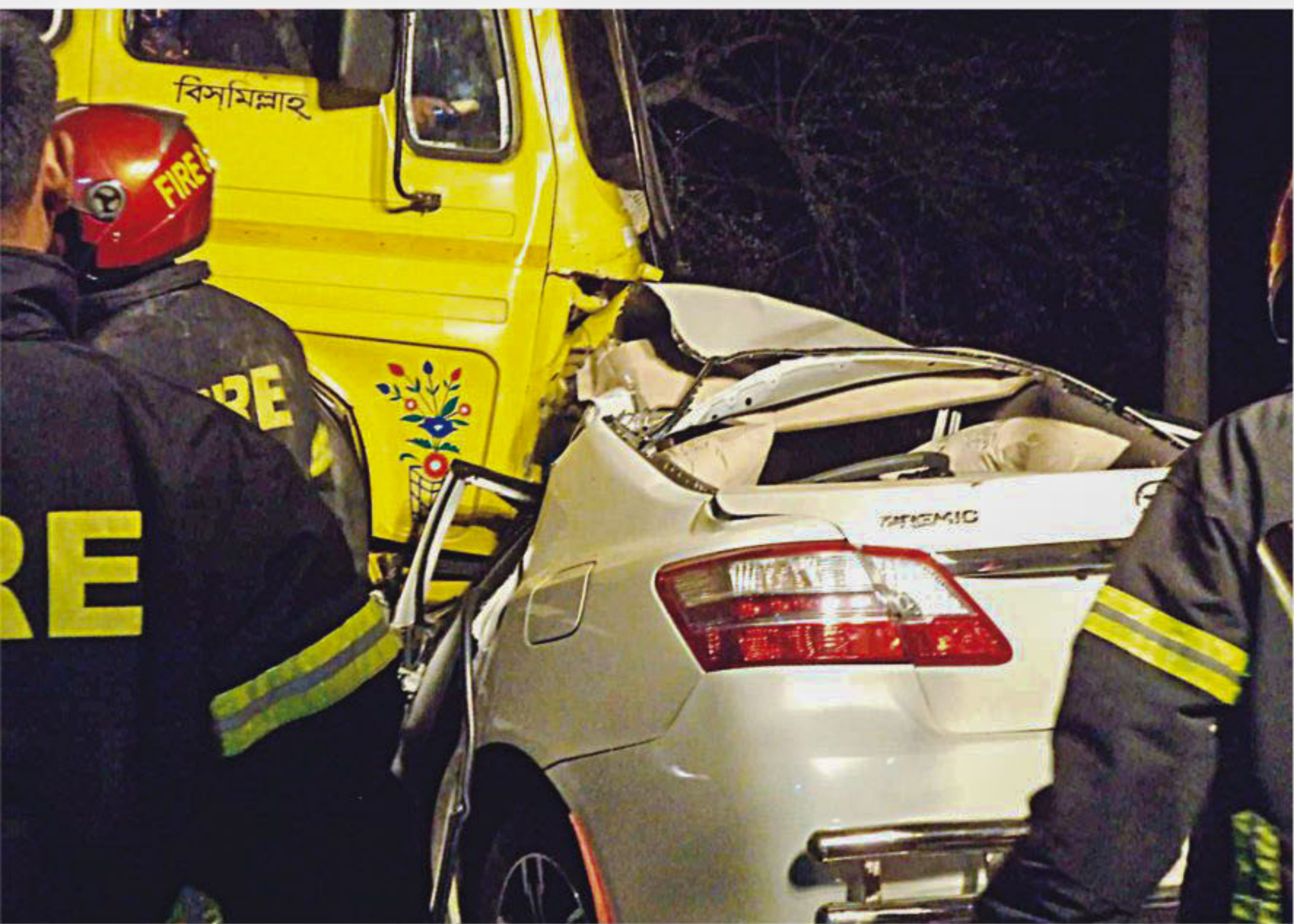
Dormitories at the university are occupied by pro-ruling Awami League student body Chhatra League, said Al Mehedi Talukder, DU unit president of Chhatra Dal.

"Besides, there is no coexistence of all student bodies on the campus. The DU authorities are conspiring to hold a one-sided election," added Mehedi.

Earlier on January 29, different left-leaning student bodies and Chhatra Dal came down hard on the DU syndicate after it decided to set up polling stations at student dormitories.

Only Chhatra League hailed the syndicate decision.

On February 7, Chhatra Dal submitted a memorandum to DU Vice Chancellor Md Akhtaruzzaman, demanding a safe environment for polls and calling for postponement of the election for three months.



The wreckage of a car after it collided head-on with a truck in Khulna's Labonchhara area around 11:00pm on Sunday. The crash killed five people, including four college students, who were in the car.

Trip ends in tragedy

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Gazi Shafiqur Rahman, uncle of Utshob, one of the victims, said, "They [the victims] were fond of travelling. Since Sadiqul bought a new car, they rode to Khulna in it on Sunday. Sadiqul was at the wheel when they were on their way back from Zero Point in Khulna. But they did not return alive."

Wadud Mia, father of Babu, another victim said, "I will never see my son. The accident took him away from us."

Shafiqul Islam, officer-in-charge of Labonchhara Police Station, told The Daily Star that the driver of a cement-laden truck, heading towards Zero Point, lost control over and hit the car around 11:30pm yesterday, leaving the five dead on the spot.

However, a witness who reported the accident to police, said, under anonymity, that the road on which the accident took was a one way road and the car was not only being driven recklessly, but also on the wrong way.

Police recovered the bodies and first took them to Khulna Medical College Hospital and then to Gopalganj Sadar Hospital Morgue, the OC said.

The bodies, however, were buried without autopsies, sources said.

Atanu Mondal, a BCL activist, said Sadiqul bought the new car a few months ago and used to travel to different places with his friends and party activists.

"They came from Gopalganj that day to have lunch at a hotel. After a bar-b-que at Arongghata in Khulna city, they boarded the car at night and started for Gopalganj," he added.

Jahed Mahmud Bappi, general secretary of Gopalganj Jubo League, said, "We have lost five lives. We were like a family. The void created in the Chhatra League and Jubo League due to their death can never be filled."

The bodies were buried at old municipality graveyard and Fokirabad graveyard after the namaz-e-janaza, sources said.

Police said the truck driver and his helper were both on the run and no one was arrested in this connection until last night.

The BCL expressed condolence in a statement last evening.

Our Khulna and Faridpur correspondents contributed for the report.

PHOTO: COLLECTED